

Our Views: Clinic to help pets, people

Advocate Opinion page staff

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People and pets alike could benefit from a shelter and medical clinic for animals to be built at Dixon Correctional Institute.

Up to 500 pets could be housed and cared for at the facility under supervision of students from the LSU veterinary school, who will stay in the medical center and visitor areas at the medium security prison near Jackson. Handpicked, trained inmates would assist in caring for the animals.

The facility could be used to save pets during disasters, and it would operate year-round to house strays from East Baton Rouge and East Feliciana parishes and prepare the animals for adoption. The shelter also is to train animals to help people with special needs, such as the blind and the elderly.

Some pet owners' lives were jeopardized when they refused rescue in the wake of Hurricane Katrina after being told they would have to leave their pets behind.

The facility at DCI might help prevent such unfortunate situations in some future disaster.

Construction of the shelter and clinic is to begin soon, thanks in part to the Humane Society of the United States, which is making \$600,000 available for the project. Inmate labor will be used in construction, which is expected to be finished in April, Dixon Warden James LeBlanc said.

Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of the HSUS, said the society's grant for the facility is a response to the deaths of perhaps as many as 50,000 pets during Hurricane Katrina.

Use of the facility as an adoption center could save some of the approximately 8,000 animals euthanized yearly in East Baton Rouge Parish, LSU School of Veterinary Medicine Associate Dean David Senior said.

We commend all those involved in this project, especially the veterinary students and DCI inmates who will do the daily work necessary for the shelter and clinic's success.